

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

The teaching, if I am not mistaken, comes to this—that just as, and as surely as, the outward and visible sign of the washing of water in the bath of regeneration avails to the putting away of the filth of the flesh, so, and so surely, the inward and spiritual grace which is therein signified and sealed to the believing soul avails (through the washing of the Blood of Christ) to the cleansing (or sprinkling) of our hearts from an evil conscience—the conscience, that, is, convinced of the evil of sin—so that, as men washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God, we may have boldness to enter even into the holiest by the Blood of Jesus, and draw near to the throne of grace with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Here I close my list of examples, not, however, because there are none others that might be adduced.

I only desire to say in conclusion that the value of these examples must not be estimated merely by regarding separately this one and that one. They should be looked at in their relation one to another, and specially in their relation to the passages quoted from the Old Testament—the literature with which the New Testament writers were most familiar.

N. DIMOCK.



#### ART. VII.—THOUGHTS ON ISAIAH.—I.

WITH the permission of the editor, a series of papers will be submitted to his readers on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. The treatment of the prophetic writings has varied much from age to age. The early Fathers were accustomed to regard them as storehouses of passages from which particular doctrines might be proved or inferred, or from which much valuable instruction might be derived by means of allegorical or, which was supposed to be the same thing, *spiritual* treatment. The medieval writers, for the most part, carried to a still further extreme the methods of their predecessors. In later years the prophetic books have been regarded almost exclusively from a Messianic point of view. Little or no attempt has been made to view them in their historical setting. The consequence has been that some passages have been tortured to yield a Messianic sense, and many others, replete with spiritual and moral teaching of the utmost value, have been neglected altogether, because it was impossible to extract a Messianic meaning out of them. The inevitable reaction has now set in. A school has arisen which has already done much valuable work in bringing us back from the region of predictive, or

ideal, or dogmatic interpretation to the standpoint of the prophet himself, and its members have been materially aided by the recent historical discoveries, which have recreated for us the epoch at which the prophets wrote. But the new school has "the defects of its qualities." Reactions almost invariably go too far in the opposite direction to that from which they start. And in the present case there has been an unfortunate tendency on the part of the realistic expositor not only to minimize the supernatural, or as, in view of the ambiguity of that word, I prefer to call it, the *spiritual* in the Scriptures, but needlessly to limit the amount of direct Messianic teaching which, though its extent may sometimes have been exaggerated, must, on every rational and common-sense interpretation of the prophetic writings, most unquestionably be admitted to exist. There is no disposition to underrate the value to the devout student of the able and earnest volume of Professor G. A. Smith; but it must, nevertheless, be confessed that, beside an occasional tendency to substitute a new set of strained and fanciful analogies for those of expositors of earlier date, there is also to be found in it a disposition to exaggerate the human and to minimize the direct and objective Divine element in Isaiah's writings. The Professor tells us, for instance, that the word *vision*, with which Isaiah's prophecies commence, "is not employed to express any magical display before the prophet of the very words which he was to speak to the people." Why should the whole question be prejudged in this way by the use of such a disparaging word as "magical"? Might not the "display" of which he speaks be miraculous rather than "magical"? Is it impossible for God to make known His purposes by means of visions? Are not numerous instances of the "vision" recorded in Holy Writ? Do we know for certain that the Prophet Isaiah, whose amazing power of spiritual insight is the great feature of his writings, had *not* before his mind's eye the picture which he strives to place before us? And why does Dr. Smith add the *dictum* of the schools—these *dicta*, by the way, laid down without sufficient proof, are among the least attractive features of the new school of criticism—that the original meaning of the Hebrew word here used is "to cleave, or split"? Dr. Smith must know perfectly well that some of the best authorities do not agree with him here. He ought, therefore, to have furnished us with some proof of his assertion. In the absence of such proof we are entitled at least to assert that there is sufficient authority for the belief that the word *vision* here means just what it says. Besides, there is the additional evidence of the rest of the sentence. "The vision which he *saw*," we read, which does not necessarily mean

“the penetrativeness with which he penetrated.” Why, again, should Professor Smith attribute to the enlarged “political experience” of the prophet that in which the Christian Church has from the first discerned his spiritual insight, derived by special inspiration from on high? That there was growth, human and natural growth, in the mind of the prophet, and that the results of this growth doubtless mingled with his spiritual intuitions, no one, we presume, would be bold enough to deny. But in view of the phenomena presented by the prophetic writings, and of the uniform belief held from the time in which they were written to the present day that there is much in them which altogether transcends the ordinary natural processes of human thought, has a writer of any school the right to ignore or to put in the background the very characteristics which differentiate the prophet from other men, the Bible from other books? Why, again, should the Professor assert—and once more assert without proving—that even the short section, chapters ii. to iv., contains “utterances” which “conflict one with another”? This manufacture, as we cannot but call it, of contradictions, this tendency to substitute dogma for argument, are two of the most unfortunate characteristics of the school which is now in fashion. And they are an insufficient ground on which to set aside or to disparage the unique character of the works with which we are dealing.

It is not, however, the object of these papers to enter into controversy with Dr. Smith or any other member of the critical school. We do but note in passing certain tendencies of that school which are full of danger, and of which we shall, therefore, do well to steer clear. Our object is to provide the student in his closet and the preacher in his pulpit with an exegesis which, whatever its shortcomings, is at least free from the grave perils to which we have referred—from the tacit and unjustifiable assumptions in the direction of naturalism which pervade a volume otherwise extremely useful. The student and the preacher will certainly do well to consult it; but they must consult it with care, and be on their guard against the tendency to explain away the supernatural which crops up continually throughout its pages. For the flesh and even the bones of animals have been known to be coloured by what they feed on. It will not be well for us if the pulpit expositions of the clergy, intended to feed their people with the Bread of Life, should colour their whole inner being with the tinge of pure humanism. “I give the Old Testament a wide berth,” said one of the clergy of our Church the other day to the writer. And so at present do many of his brethren and many of his hearers. In part this is due to a certain phase

of Puritanism which has been accustomed to regard the Old Testament rather as "done away" than as "fulfilled" in Christ. But this tendency has been strongly reinforced of late by the teaching of the modern critic, which is calculated to reduce the evidential value of the Old Testament to zero, and its moral authority to a lower level than that of a modern novel.<sup>1</sup> It is well, therefore, to recall the warning which that clear and brilliant thinker, Archbishop Magee, has left us: "However we may attempt to distinguish between Scripture and Scripture, between the living and the dead Word, Scripture refuses to accommodate itself to any such treatment. The Christ whom we worship received, owned, lived by the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures, tells us by the mouth of His Apostle that it is all inspired, all profitable, all written for our learning. The credit of the New Testament is thus, as it were, pledged for that of the Old, and *whatever weakens our respect for the one must eventually weaken it for the other.*"<sup>2</sup>

These remarks must only be understood as expressive of a desire to keep criticism in its proper place. It certainly is not our object to proscribe it altogether. But in these days people very often appear to forget that the true object of criticism is not to explain away that which is criticised, but to elucidate Holy Writ, to bring out its meaning, to make clear to us the circumstances under which it was composed, and the object and aims of the writers. The critic has no right to set aside, on *a priori* grounds, fundamental principles of faith which have been arrived at by other means and on other grounds. It is one thing to discuss questions of date and authorship, the true text of the writings with which we have to deal, the circumstances in the history of surrounding nations which may throw light upon the condition or feelings of the Israelites, even the respective spheres of the Divine and of the human in the Scriptures. It is quite another to attempt to decide whether a revelation from God be credible or not, or, supposing it to be credible, to lay down conditions as to the way it may be expected to have been made. If there is reason to believe that the sacred writings contain evidences of the date at which they are composed, if the recently disinterred records of the past throw any light upon their contents, if

<sup>1</sup> Professor Robertson ("Early Religion of Israel," Preface, p. xi) uses a similar expression.

<sup>2</sup> "Christ the Light of all Scripture," p. 7. The whole sermon is full of valuable suggestions. See also Robertson, "Early Religion of Israel," Preface, p. xi: "The Christian scholar must be prepared to meet the objector who insists on meting out the same measure to the New Testament writers."

these discoveries should compel us to abandon some conclusions which insufficient information had led us to form, by all means let such matters be fully and freely threshed out. We have not the slightest wish to impose any conditions on the critic which should prevent him from coming to a fair and unbiassed conclusion on them. But let it be clear that the conclusion *is* fair and unbiassed. Let not the critics hamper themselves by any preconceptions concerning the possibility of miracles or prophecy, or concerning the way in which the evolution of the Divine purpose toward mankind must necessarily have taken place. Such antecedent assumptions are not freedom, but bondage. Instead of facilitating investigation, they hinder it. The critic is bound to deal with the facts before him, not to settle beforehand what those facts ought to be or must be. He has no right, for instance, to declare certain parts of his author to be of later date, because there is no allusion to them in the subsequent history, and then to strike out of that subsequent history every allusion to them that he finds there. He has no right to say that Deuteronomy quotes "JE" and "knows nothing" of the history contained in the "Priestly Code," and then to go over his Pentateuch and assign to the writer of the "Priestly Code" all the passages, and only the passages, of which Deuteronomy makes no mention. He has no right to assert that the various contributors to the Pentateuch, writing, as he declares they do, at periods far apart from one another, can be as easily detected by their style as could a cento of extracts from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pope, and Tennyson. He has no right to assume, in the absence of proof, that so barbarous a *mélange* of authors of all styles and dates would have been flung together after the Captivity, with scarcely the slightest attempt at harmonization and modernization. Nor has he any right to conceal from his readers the fact that there is not the slightest approach, even in the latest of the "sources" to which he assigns the Pentateuch, to the distinctive diction of the acknowledged post-exilic writers. He may, of course, inquire whether the Scriptures *contain* a revelation, whether there be or be not signs of a special Divine guidance of the writers whose works he has before him. But he can have no right to lay down any canons on what he imagines—very often mistakenly—to be principles scientifically established by research in other branches of knowledge as to what the course of the Divine illumination of mankind must necessarily have been. Nor is he justified declaring off-hand that such evolution must necessarily have been "slow," nor that it must have proceeded on "natural" laws, if by "natural" he means laws

usual in Nature. It is perfectly evident to every observer that, besides her ordinary processes, Nature has her cataclysms and convulsions, her epochs of change and evolution. We cannot, therefore, deny that the same features may be presented in the kingdom of grace.

We need not enter here into the evidence for revelation. Suffice it to say that it depends on cumulative considerations gathered from every department of human thought and conduct. It cannot, therefore, be overthrown by researches confined to one or two branches of human knowledge. Revelation, moreover, depends to a certain extent on external testimony. Now, the laws on which such testimony is to be dealt with have been clearly laid down long ago by historians. We have no right whatever to set aside those laws because, in the history of a certain people, they establish the occurrence of certain phenomena which have not been observed elsewhere. The extraordinary and unprecedented way in which the authoritative and coherent tradition of Israel has been rent asunder and patched together again, just because a golden thread of special Divine guardianship consistently runs through it all, is utterly indefensible on all true scientific principles. We have a right, as believers in revelation, to demand at least that those who profess to investigate it from within shall hold fast to its two main principles, Historical Manifestation and Divine Inspiration, and to caution the Christian student against those who would induce him to enter upon the study of the sacred books of his religion apart from the safeguards which these principles afford. To the objections of those who investigate them from without we have our answer. But the Christian can only profitably view the sacred books in the light which his religion throws upon them. If he do otherwise, he will lose the blessings they were designed to impart. He who does not believe, cannot be made whole.

It only remains to say that these papers make no claim to scholarship or originality. They will make free use of the discoveries of others, but the writer will offer no discoveries of his own. His work is intended, not for advanced Hebrew students, but for simple men and women who want to study the Word of God with the aid of *some*, at least, of the lights which modern research has thrown upon it, but apart from the bewildering and not unfrequently reckless conjectures and assertions which tend so often to "darken" the "counsel" which the Word of God was designed to give. A little less originality and a little more humility than sometimes characterizes the exegesis of the present day will appear to sundry simple-minded folk to be eminently desirable. At all events,

it is the aim of the writer to walk, and encourage others to walk, "in the old paths," though he would not, of course, deprive them of any assistance from modern research which may serve to help them on their way.

The following extract from a well-known work, written by one at whose feet the writer sat in his youth, will illustrate the spirit, at once liberal and orthodox, by which he desires to be guided in these pages :

"These thoughts have reference chiefly to the New Testament. But the conviction has been fixing itself deeply in my mind that the Old Testament, too, ought to be read much more simply and according to the letter than we are used to read it; that we have not made its application to our individual cases more clear by overlooking its obvious national characteristics; that if we had given heed to them we should have found an interpretation of some of the greatest difficulties in history and in the condition of the world around us. This opinion is strangely opposed to that which is common among the philosophical thinkers of our day. It sets me in direct opposition to those writers, in this country and America, who make it their business to copy German models, though it does not authorize me to refuse any help from German learning when it comes within my reach, or to pronounce sentence upon a nation with which I am most imperfectly acquainted, or to generalize under one name theologians who, I suppose, exhibit as many varieties of opinion and are scattered through as many schools as our own."<sup>1</sup>

---

ART. VIII.—THE MONTH.

IT is seldom that a New Year promises to answer to that designation so fully as the one on which we are just entering. In politics, at all events, we seem to be entering on an entirely new career. The subjects which occupied our thoughts at the commencement of last year have almost disappeared from view; the old divisions of party seem vanishing, and an issue is before the country of which no one dreamt twelve months ago—except, we suppose, the statesman who has created it and the two or three others who may have shared his thoughts. It is difficult to recall so complete a transformation in the political world. The last thing that

---

<sup>1</sup> F. D. Maurice, "Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament," Dedication, p. xi.